

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2449

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 2408

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SN

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE CABINET RESHUFFLE

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1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW ANNOUNCED CABINET CHANGES EFFECTIVE JUNE 2 WHICH INCLUDE THE REPLACEMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER YONG NYUK LIN AND CHANGES IN PORTFOLIOS OF FOUR OTHER MINISTERS COVERING COMMUNICATIONS, NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, HEALTH, AND EDUCATION. IN THIS FIRST CABINET RESHUFFLE SINCE JUST AFTER THE 1972 ELECTION, THREE BRIGHT AND IMAGINATIVE YOUNG MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WERE APPOINTED TO SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE POSITIONS WITH CABINET MEMBERSHIP. ALTHOUGH DR. TOH CHIN CHYE AND LIM KIM SAN WILL EACH HOLD TWO PORTFOLIOS, THEY APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN KICKED UPSTAIRS. THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHANGES WILL BECOME CLEARER WHEN RE-ASSIGNMENTS OF PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY AND PERMANENT SECRETARY POSITIONS ARE MADE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. POLITICALLY, THE NEW APPOINTMENTS SEEM TO REPRESENT A TREND TOWARD GREATER YOUTH, PROFESSIONAL DYNAMISM AND OPENNESS WHICH SHOULD BRING A BREATH OF FRESH AIR INTO A GOVERNMENT WHICH HAD BEGUN TO SUFFER IN CERTAIN AREAS FROM A HARDENING OF THE ARTERIES. END SUMMARY.

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END CONFIDENTIAL

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2. THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE HAS ANNOUNCED THE FOLLOWING
CHANGES IN CABINET EFFECTIVE JUNE 2:

COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER YONG NYUK LIN (56) WILL RELINQUISH HIS PORTFOLIO AUGUST 1 TO LIM KIM SAN (58). YONG WILL HOLD THE PERSONAL RANK OF MINISTER UNTIL MARCH 31, 1976, AND WILL RECEIVE A DIPLOMATIC POSTING -- POSSIBLY TO LONDON OR WASHINGTON. LIM WILL BE IN NOMINAL CHARGE OF COMMUNICATIONS, BUT A NEW SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, ONG TENG CHEONG (38), WILL EXERCISE FULL MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS, ATTENDING CABINET MEETINGS AND PRESENTING PAPERS ON BEHALF OF THE MINISTRY DURING DISCUSSIONS. HERMAN HOCHSTADT REMAINS A SECOND PERM SEC, BUT SIM KEE BOON BECOMES FIRST PERM SEC (IN ADDITION TO DUTIES AS PERM SEC AT FINANCE FOR ECONOMIC ACTIVATION).

3. LIM HAS ALSO BEEN NAMED MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT REPLACING E.W. BARKER AND WILL REMAIN AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC UTILITIES BOARD. THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENT MAKES IT CLEAR THAT AS IN THE CASE OF HIS COMMUNICATIONS PORTFOLIO LIM WILL EXERCISE ONLY NOMINAL CONTROL OVER THIS MINISTRY. TAN ENG LIANG (37) HAS BEEN APPOINTED SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE AND, LIKE ONG WILL EXERCISE FULL MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS. TAN CONTINUES AS CHAIRMAN OF THE URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY AND BECOMES CHAIRMAN OF THE SINGAPORE SPORTS COUNCIL REPLACING DR. B.K. SEN.

4. MINISTER E.W. BARKER, WHO WILL YIELD HIS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO TO LIM KIM SAN, WILL REPLACE LIM AS MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT. BARKER WILL CONTINUE AS MINISTER FOR LAW.

5. LEE CHIAW MENG (38) HAS BEEN APPOINTED MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY REPLACING TOH CHIN CHYE. DR. LEE CONTINUES AS VICE CHANCELLOR OF NANYANG UNIVERSITY AND WILL TAKE CHARGE OF SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC AND Ngee Ann Technical College.

6. DR. TOH CHIN CHYE HAS BEEN NAMED MINISTER OF HEALTH REPLACING CHUA SIAN CHIN, MR CHUA WILL CONTINUE AS MINISTER OF
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HOME AFFAIRS. DR. TOH HAS ALSO BEEN NAMED MINISTER FOR EDUCATION REPLACING LEE CHIAW MENG. HOWEVER, THE ANNOUNCEMENT STATES THAT DR. TOH WILL EXERCISE ONLY NOMINAL CONTROL WITH DAY-TO-DAY ADMINISTRATION OF THE MINISTRY TO BE DIRECTED BY CHAI CHONG YII (40) WHO HAS BEEN APPOINTED SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE WILL FULL MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS. PERHAPS THE GREATEST SURPRISE IS THAT DR. TOH IS TO GIVE UP HIS VICE CHANCELLORSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE ON JUNE 15. KWAN SAI KHENG WILL ACT AS VICE CHANCELLOR UNTIL "FORMAL APPOINTMENT IS MADE BY UNIVERSITY COUNCIL." HOWEVER, SEVERAL EMBASSY SOURCES BELIEVE KWAN WILL SHORTLY BE NAMED VICE CHANCELLOR. END UNCLASSIFIED.

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7. COMMENT: THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESHUFFLE WILL BECOME CLEARER WHEN CHANGES IN PARLIAMENTARY AND PERMANENT SECRETARIES ARE ANNOUNCED, PROBABLY WITHIN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS IS CLEARLY UNDERGOING A SHAKEUP AT THE TOP, WHICH ALMOST CERTAINLY REFLECTS DISSATISFACTION WITH THE WAY IT HAS HANDLED BURGEONING PROBLEMS OF TRAFFIC CONGESTION, PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, AND CIVIL AVIATION. YONG BECOMES A LAME DUCK MINISTER AND THE SUBSTANTIVE DIRECTION OF THE MINISTRY SHIFTS TO ONG TENG CHEONG, NEWLY NAMED SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE, UNDER THE NOMINAL DIRECTION OF LIM KIM SAN. ONG IS AN ARCHITECT AND HAS EXPERIENCE IN TRAFFIC PLANNING WHICH WILL BE USEFUL IN FUTURE DECISIONS ON MASS RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM, PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS, AND PERHAPS SOME MODIFICATIONS IN THE AREA LICENSING SCHEME FOR DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC. THIS MINISTRY WILL ALSO ACQUIRE THE HIGHLY RESPECTED MANAGERIAL SERVICES OF SIM KEE BOON AS FIRST PERM SEC.

8. CHAI CHONG YII APPEARS TO BE PROMOTED IN HIS MOVE FROM COMMUNICATIONS TO EDUCATION WHERE HE WILL EXERCISE FULL MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS. SOME OBSERVERS SAY THAT CHAI WAS BROUGHT TO COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEFUSING THE UNION ISSUE IN THE SINGAPORE BUS SYSTEM, AN ASSIGNMENT WHICH HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED WHILE AVOIDING THE STIGMA OF CRITICISM DIRECTED TOWARD THE MINISTRY'S HANDLING OF BURGEONING TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS. CHAI MAY HAVE

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BEEN MOVED TO EDUCATION TO STRAIGHTEN OUT SOME OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SNARLS WHICH DEVELOPED IN PROMOTING THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF BILINGUALISM. HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY IS DOUBTFUL WHETHER CHAI HAS SUFFICIENT STATURE AND VISION TO GIVE REALLY IMAGINATIVE AND SPIRITED DIRECTION TO THIS MINISTRY. SINCE HE IS LESS OF AN INDEPENDENT THINKER THAN TAN AND ONG, IT MAY TURN OUT THAT DR. TOH'S CONTROL IS LESS NOMINAL THAN THE ANNOUNCEMENT WOULD INDICATE. FURTHERMORE, DR. TOH IS AN OPINIONATED AUTOCRAT AND MAY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO CEDE MOST OF THE AUTHORITY TO HIS SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE.

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9. POLITICALLY, THE CHANGES INDICATE THAT PRIME MINISTER LEE IS REACHING DOWN TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF PAP LEADER IN AN EFFORT TO INFUSE NEW BLOOD INTO BOTH THE CABINET AS POLICY-MAKING FORUM AND INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES. THE THREE NEW SENIOR MINISTERS OF STATE TAN, ONG, AND CHAI MAY BE THE FIRST WAVE OF THE SECOND GENERATION OF THE PAP LEADERSHIP. EMBOFFS OBSERVE THEIR NOTABLE CHARACTERISTICS ARE OPENNESS AND ACHIEVEMENT. THEY SHOULD PROVIDE NEW VIEWPOINTS AND FRESH IDEAS IN CABINET. BY APPOINTING THEM AS SENIOR MINISTERS OF STATE WITH FULL MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS, THE PRIME MINISTER IS GIVING THEM A CHANCE TO SHOW WHAT THEY CAN DO WHILE KEEPING OLDER, COMPLETELY LOYAL AND EXPERIENCED MINISTERS OVER THEM. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THIS FORMULA WILL LEAD TO IMAGINATIVE PERFORMANCE OR UNPRODUCTIVE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS.

10. CABINET CHANGES DO NOT APPEAR DIRECTLY TO AFFECT THE QUESTION OF SUCCESSION TO LEE KUAN YEW. HOWEVER, PERSONAL POLITICAL FORTUNES OF SEVERAL KEY FIGURES ARE AFFECTED. YONG NYUK LIN HAS MOVED DOWN AND OUT. FOR THE THREE NEWCOMERS, TAN, ONG, AND CHAI, IT IS A MOVE UP AND IN. ALTHOUGH DR. TOH CHIN CHYE MAY ATTEMPT TO ASSERT BROAD CONTROL OVER EDUCATIONAL POLICY, HE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN KICKED UPSTAIRS AND REMOVED FROM DIRECT CONTROL OVER HIGHER EDUCATION. HIS DE-CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTURE AS VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY (WHICH HE HAS BLIGHTED BY HIS AUTOCRATIC RULE) WILL BE GREETED BY SIGHS OF RELIEF FROM BOTH FACULTY AND STUDENTS. DR. LEE CHIAW MENG, A PROTEGEE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, ASSUMES KEY POSITIONS IN EDUCATION, INCLUDING THE HIGHLY TOUTED TERTIARY-EDUCATION SYSTEM. LIM KIM SAN REMAINS AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PUB, BUT LOSES HIS ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO FOR TWO OTHER MINISTERIAL POSITIONS WHERE HE IS EXPECTED TO EXERCISE A TUTORIAL FUNCTION WITH RESPECT TO HIS NEW SENIOR MINISTERS OF STATE, TAN, AND ONG. MINISTER BARKER ADMITTED TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT HIS SWITCH FROM NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO ENVIRONMENT REPRESENTED A DEMOTION.

11. ONE NOTICEABLE ABSENCE FROM ALL THE CHANGES IS DR. AUGUSTINE

TAN, POLITICAL SECRETARY, IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE.
DR. TAN IS KNOWN TO AMBITIOUSLY SEEK A MINISTERIAL POSITION
AND IS PROBABLY QUITE DISAPPOINTED.
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